

THE WHITE MAN BESTOWS THE FEATHERS

With the opening up of the western prairies in the last century white pioneers came in contact with Indians wearing elaborate head-dresses of dyed eagle feathers. The idea of an Indian riding over the trackless prairie with a spectacular cascade of feathers streaming behind his head appealed to the imagination of the period. Fiction writers mentioned head-dresses and artists used them; on calendars, in illustrations and the cigar store Indians of the last century they are shown as if they were characteristic of all Indians. Needless to say, this was an error; they belonged to the Plains Indians and to them alone. No one could wear such a head-dress in the dense forests either of the west coast or of Ontario.

However, the tradition of the head-dress got into history books and Indian children in all parts of North America "learned" that their forefathers used feathers—the white man said so, therefore it must be so. It was an easy step from this to the manufacture of feather head-dresses, often of chicken feathers, to satisfy the wishes of the tourist photographer or the needs of the pageant. So to-day one meets in all parts of the continent feather head-dresses often clumsily made. They are sad degenerations of the beautifully manufactured and dyed insignia of the Plains Indians, wherein each feather stood for a definite achievement according to rules of warfare that were as rigid as they were in the days of the tournaments of mediaeval Europe. In the Royal Ontario Museum there are examples of superb Plains head-dresses including one worn by Sitting Bull; in the Ontario gallery, a later specimen from Northern Ontario shows how the concept had spread, and the workmanship, at the same time, become cruder.

THE LEGEND OF THE MAGNET

The story is told that many centuries ago, a little shepherd lad named Magnes was herding his sheep on Mount Ida. Suddenly he became aware that his feet and staff were stuck to the ground. Now all of us have been stuck in the mud, but here there was no mud. The boy stood on bare rock. It seems that he had walked onto a deposit of a mineral which acted like a magnet and attracted the nails in his boots and the iron ferrel of his staff. This attractive mineral was called magnetite after the shepherd boy. While all magnetite will not act as a magnet and attract iron to it, nevertheless, all magnetite is attracted to a magnet. In the Royal Ontario Museum there is an exhibit of magnetite suspended over some small compasses, each a magnet, showing how the specimen affects the positions of the compass needles. This has a practical bearing in the field when unwittingly a prospector, or hunter, walks over a body of magnetite-bearing rock. His compass no longer points north and if the sun is not shining he may wander for some time before getting free of the influence of this "attractive" mineral.

GONE WITH THE PANZER DIVISIONS

Like the modern tank, some ancient animals of which dinosaurs and fishes may be instanced, bore very heavy protective plates. Another example in the Royal Ontario Museum is the Glyptodon, not long extinct. It is a sluggish, well-armoured relative of the present day armadillo of South and Central America. The most striking feature of the specimen is the huge, almost hemispheric shell that covered the back and protected the animal lodged beneath it. This solid, arched buckler, five feet long and three and a half feet high, is made up of small, many sided, biscuit-shaped bones fitted together edge to edge. Unlike the turtle, which the specimen might suggest, the Glyptodon is a mammal, i.e., a hairy animal that suckles its young.

This unusual looking creature came from South America, where such animals flourished within the last million years. At that time most of Canada was covered with a great ice sheet, along the borders of which roamed the contemporary shaggy-coated mammoth and mastodon.

BEAR AND MINK SEEN BY COTTAGERS

August is a good month for seeing the black bear or mink in the summer resort areas of Ontario, according to the zoologists of the Royal Ontario Museum. At that time the bear is seen because he comes into the open to feed on blueberries, a favourite food of his. Do not be too much afraid of the bear. He is a coward who has been much maligned. The mink, too, is likely to be observed by the northern visitor in August. By then, the mink pups are mature enough to travel about. The young and adults come into view as they wander freely along the shores of rivers and lakes.

THE OLD SILVER OF NEW ENGLAND AND QUEBEC

Representative specimens of silversmithing from Quebec Province and New England are on view in the Department of Archaeology. The New England silver begins with a fine beaker, dated 1697, by J. Dummer; another by Winslow, and a tankard by Paul Revere. The Canadian silver was made in the 18th and early 19th centuries by Ranvoyzé, Amyot, and Sasseville of Quebec; and Morand and others of Montreal, mostly for church use. Part of the exhibition is a long-term loan from the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale Gallery of Fine Arts; the remainder is from the Museum's collection.

2. LOCAL MUSEUMS: THEIR USEFULNESS

In the Royal Ontario Museum and in museums in general, there are collections of carefully preserved objects. Such specimens make a more direct and vivid impact on the human mind than do words or pictures. There are three chief ends served by the collections: entertainment and instruction for all; inspiration for the artist and craftsman; research for the specialist. The local museum will not be much concerned with the last mentioned aim. Instead, it should interpret the local setting—the soil and its products; the animals; the historical background; the economic and cultural features of the area. It can clarify man's place in nature. It can help to point the way for the future.

